

SECRET

7 September 1968

SUBJECT: Communist Objectives and Courses of Action

1. We agree generally with General Abrams' conclusion that the current military campaign will be "stretched out." The Communist leadership probably would see little to be gained at this stage by another "climactic" or suicidal military offensive on the order of the Tet attacks. We doubt they would be able to mount such a military effort in the face of General Abrams' counteroperations. We also doubt that in view of our unwavering position at Paris and the outcome of the recent political conventions here at home, they would anticipate any results which could justify the terrible cost of another great, suicidal effort. On the other hand, a campaign of more or less sustained military operations on a modest scale, accompanied by intensified urban terrorism, would maintain a low-risk background of continuing pressure against which they could undertake a variety of political initiatives which they might hope would break the deadlock on the bombing issue at Paris and would embarrass and weaken the GVN in Saigon.

2. These general conclusions are based on the view -- not conclusively supported by concrete "evidence" -- that the Communist side sees the current period as a transitional one. They had hoped their campaigns earlier this year would cause us to abandon hope of an ultimate military victory, and that we would by now have halted the bombing as an initial concession toward a compromise political settlement. While they must clearly recognize that their military effort failed to achieve their full aims, they nevertheless probably feel that they are closer to attainment now than they were last year at this time. We believe they would interpret our presence at Paris, and the scope of the "anti-war" movement here at home, as encouraging developments on the profit side of the ledger -- however marginal and costly they may seem in our eyes.

3. Their basic aim at this point must be to bring us further along the path toward unilateral concessions, at a time when we are preparing for a change in administrations. With all the uncertainties inherent in

1- WH Special Projects
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SECRET

this political process -- which are certainly known to them -- we doubt they would feel that they can decisively influence the outcome of the elections in any way profitable to them. We are not sure whether they could rationalize a distinct preference for pressing for a settlement now rather than waiting for the next administration. We believe they remain confident we will ultimately come around, and that it is only a matter of time. Coupling this conclusion with the military factors cited earlier, we believe they see the current period as one requiring sustained -- but unspectacular and low-cost -- pressure on all fronts. This will include a military effort comparable to their winter campaign of last October - January, prior to the spring offensive. This will be accompanied by intensified terrorist and sapper attacks in urban areas, focusing perhaps on political assassinations to erode GVN effectiveness. Diplomatically, we would expect hints of flexibility designed to "make it easier" for us to undertake a full bombing halt without formal reciprocity.

4. We have considered the possibility of a unilateral ceasefire initiative by the Communists. We feel this could offer them numerous advantages, particularly in the psychological realm. It might be undertaken as a gesture of ostensible reciprocity. It might be put forth either as a proposal for mutual implementation, or as a unilateral declaration, challenging us to stop both the bombing in the North and our operations in the South. In any eventuality, we think such a move would be primarily a tactical one, aimed at giving them some temporary advantage or respite. They know that a ceasefire "in place" would be extremely fragile in character, and could not last indefinitely. If their aim were a prolonged cessation of the fighting, they would press for an early regroupment of forces which would afford them temporary enclaves and also restrict allied forces -- and administration -- to specified areas.

5. The ceasefire gambit is one they could undertake at any time, and would not be out of keeping with our reading of their current general purposes. While we have no evidence that they intend to make such a proposal in the immediate future, neither can we rule it out as a course of action.

DCI/SAVA/GWAllen:jes(7 Sept 68)

7 Sept 68

THE DIRECTOR

memo
The attached results from a phone call relayed to me over at State yesterday afternoon. Walt Rostow asked for my reaction to Gen. Abrams' recent assessment, and my thoughts on what the Communists were up to at this point. I gave him a brief tentative response on the phone, indicating essentially that we were not expecting much more than some fancy footwork designed to draw us out more at Paris while keeping the pressure on in Vietnam. I told him I had already planned to meet with my colleagues after lunch to review the bidding, and would be happy to send over a few paragraphs on the consensus of the group on Saturday, if he desired. He said fine.

I met Friday afternoon with Messrs. [redacted]

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[redacted] I sent the attached over to the White House by LDX on Saturday, on the assumption that timeliness might be the keyword.

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George W. Allen

Acting Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

7 Sept 68

The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President
The White House

Following our phone conversation yesterday, I met with several of my colleagues -- all of them with considerable experience on the Vietnam problem -- to discuss recent Communist developments and likely prospects. The attached memorandum reflects the consensus of that meeting. I am forwarding it for your information as an informal expression of views on the subject. If we can be of any further help, please let us know.

George W. Allen
Acting Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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DCI/SAVA/GWAllen:jes(7 Sept 68)